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S O U T H A S I A

7. Comment on Kashmir Assembly elections (page 6).

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SOUTH ASIA

7. Comment on Kashmir Assembly elections:

Press and radio reports from India stating that Premier Sheikh Abdullah's Indian-dominated National Conference party has obtained 57 of 75 seats in the Kashmir Constituent Assembly indicate that the "elections" to these seats are being systematically rigged. They also suggest that opposition to Sheikh Abdullah's party is being ruthlessly suppressed.

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In the two provinces of Kashmir and Ladakh, National Conference candidates in 44 of the 45 constituencies have been declared elected without a vote because of the absence of opposition. In Jammu province, the National Conference has apparently recently captured 12 or 13 of the 30 seats originally reported as being contested by an opposition party -- also without a vote.

With the members of Sheikh Abdullah's party safely installed in 76 percent of the seats in the Assembly before any voting has taken place, it is obvious that the people of Kashmir will have little opportunity to express their will regarding the composition of the Assembly. Both the Indian and Kashmiri Governments will probably point to these "elections" as reflections of popular will and will use them as an argument against the need for an eventual UN-sponsored plebiscite to determine the allegiance of the State to India or Pakistan.

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